

NESTING

by

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English Creative Writing
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2011

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DEDICATION

For Nathan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am forever grateful to the University of Alabama for providing me the luxury of time and space to write. Thank you to my committee, Wendy Rawlings, Hank Lazer, Heather White and Steve Miller for their time and support. I am especially thankful to Wendy Rawlings for chairing my committee, for pushing me through drafts of my thesis and for asking hard questions of the work. Thank you, also, to Peter Streckfus, Robin Behn, Terrance Hayes and Michael Martone whose guidance in workshops helped this work along.

I am full of gratitude for my family and my friends, Leigh Bernacchi, Ely Shipley, Christine Marshall, Shira Dentz, Pepper Luboff, Harmony Button, Nicole Sheets, Esther Lee, Halina Duraj, Eryn Green, Brenda Siezckowski and Amanda Berndt, whose love and good example make up the circumstances for poetry in the first place. Thank you, also, to my dog, Franklin, for his soft fur and his need to walk three times a day.

This work would not have been possible without the extraordinary kindness and support of my partner, Nathan Hauke.

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A white rope hammock

swinging into sun

light after the body's gone

inside : to think a ghost a signature

blurred through carbon paper

mark copy request or shadow

my hand makes a maple leaf

darkness mapping its own perimeter

a green sequence of willow branches

yellow leaves a neighbor's gingko tree dark wood

frame and sky moving

I. Haunts

*Loss is the fulfillment of the Law
Space collected on a long line.
—Fanny Howe*

Still

leaves

here are
bright green
beetles in the mimosa tree

sparrows coming through
chain link
our lawn
their wings
It's all
here.

cicadas
shudder
the air
open.

Deseret : “My Mother is a Fish”

memory is a light

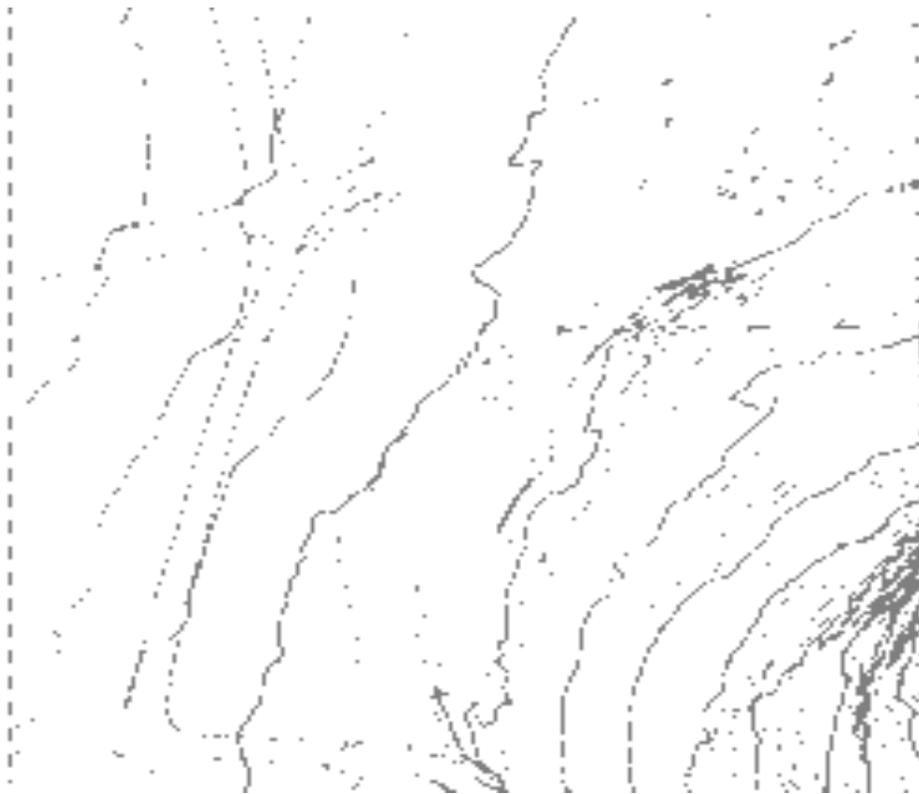
glowing through your body

like a ghost

in bones

in cells

something's always left behind



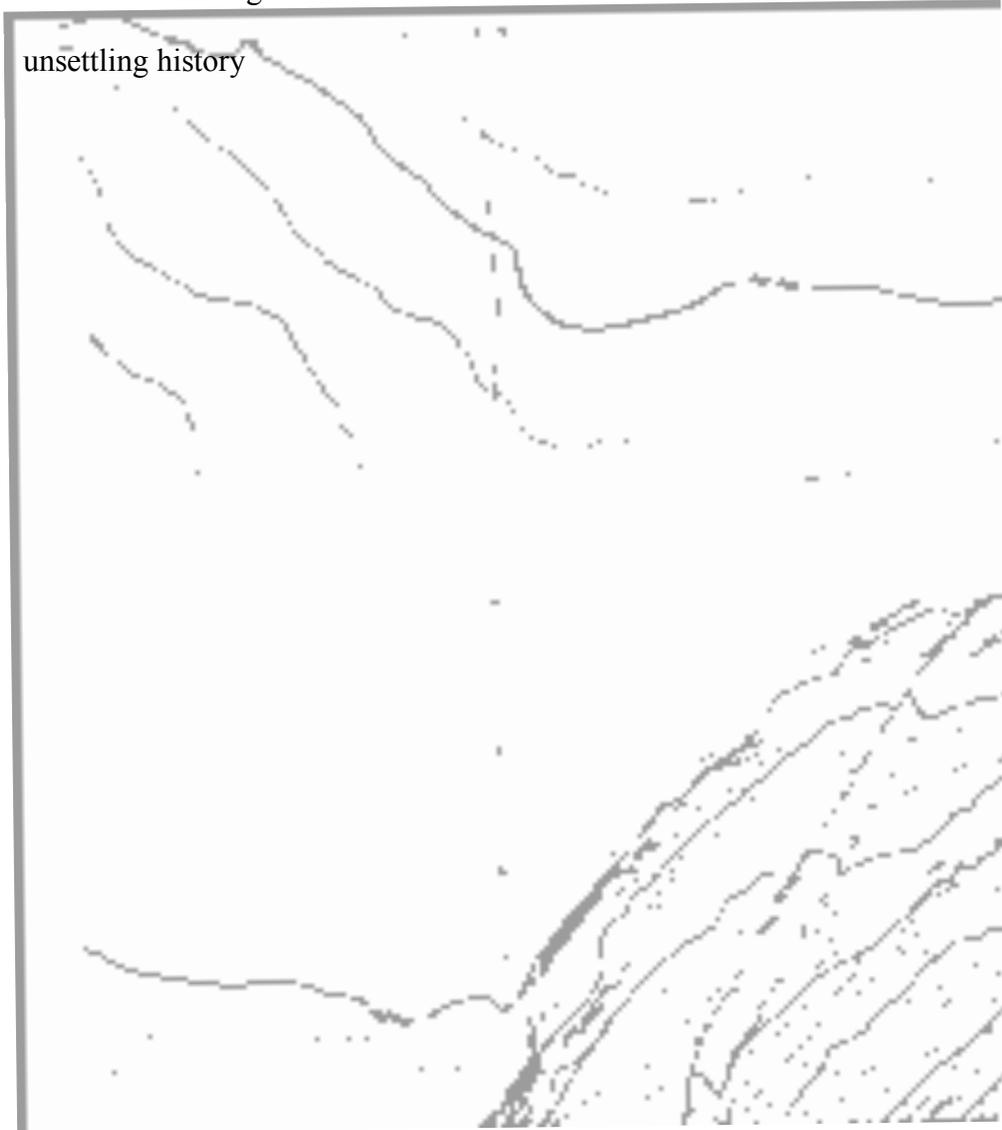
how my friend is dying

like the desert is beautiful

how my home is that word

and moves like a ghost

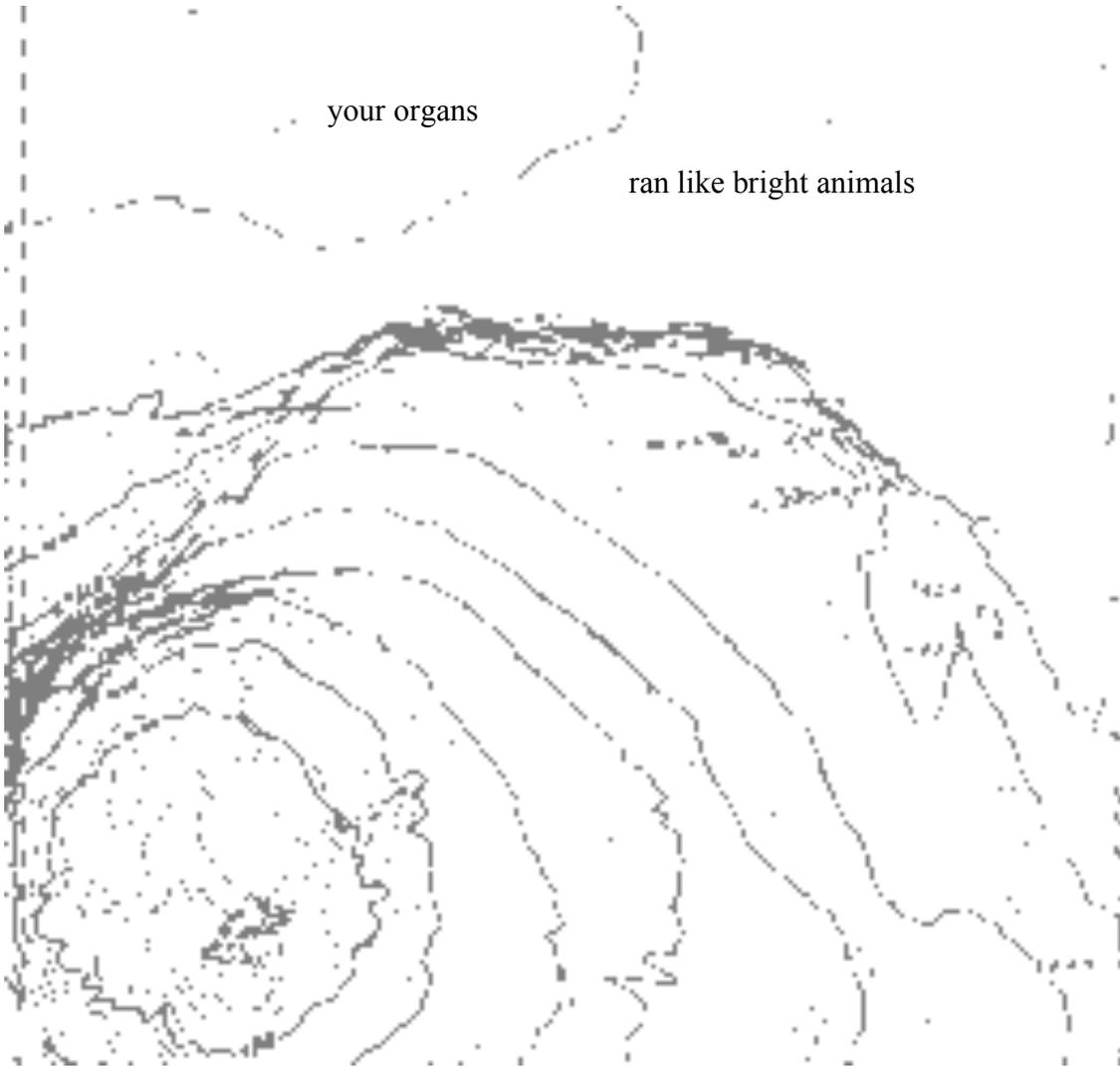
unsettling history

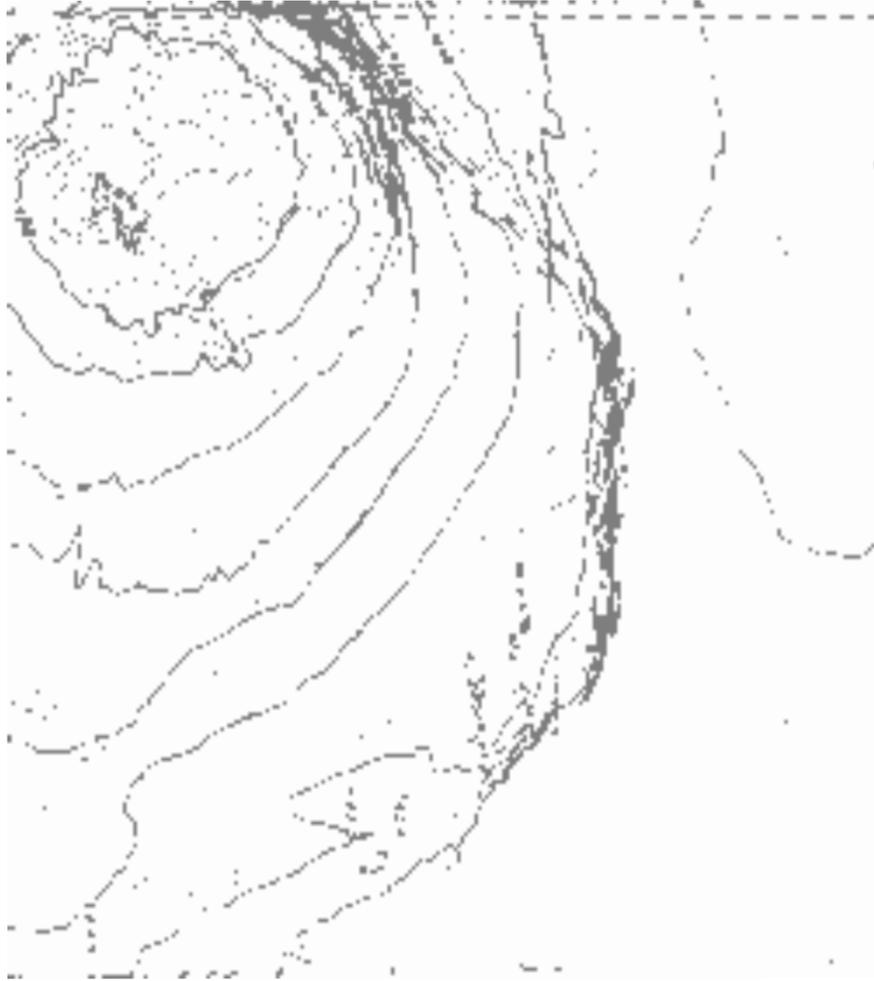


I remember you
were islands
and electric opening
through the desert

your organs

ran like bright animals





you left a note on the table
crawled on your belly
through the sand

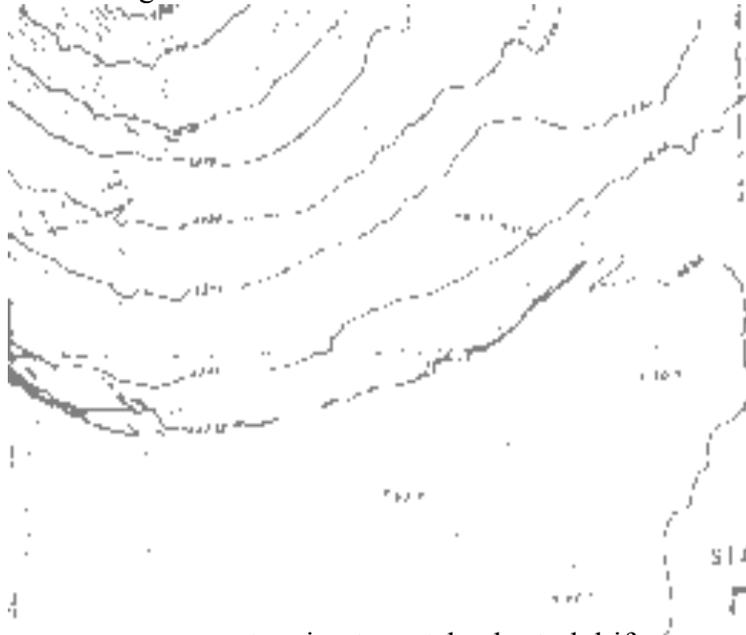
it took two days to unbraid
the Green River from your hair
like a catfish whisker
a jaw you kept on your desk

you were beautiful in that river

that morning you were beautiful

my best friend

we left Zion together



stopping to watch a kestrel drift

over the mesas

on our way to the Dairy Queen in Scipio

I'd dig a tunnel
through my bones to yours
and then I'd dig a tunnel
to the skin
a clavicle
a tailbone
skinning my back
in corpse pose
orange oil on my temples
your wide kind palms pressing into the floor

no cake at your wedding no dancing

you had your first child and your husband stopped letting you drive

you had your second child and I didn't know about it

I can still hear the way you said *pumpkin*

you were a lost tribe but your golden hair didn't make you gods

you gave me a *Book of Mormon* wrapped in a Raisin Bran box

you baptized the dead



I could never meet you

written out of eternity

written into darkness

where could I meet you

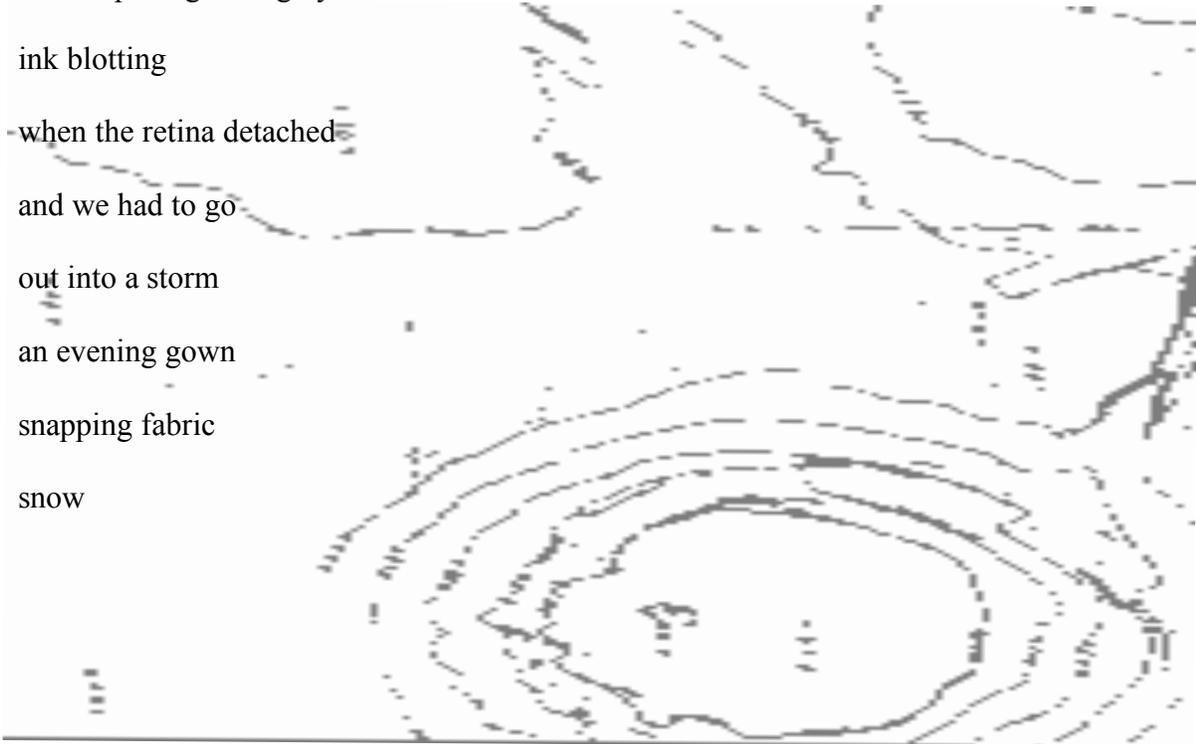
if this was your Zion

a curtain

a veil he could pull you through or not

I saw the Wasatch, columbine, indian paintbrush, the smooth granite quarry and
mountain goats balancing on the peak, long root systems, aspen, uprooted pine trees and
boulders in the spring, in the snow melt, it would be the Scarlet Tanager

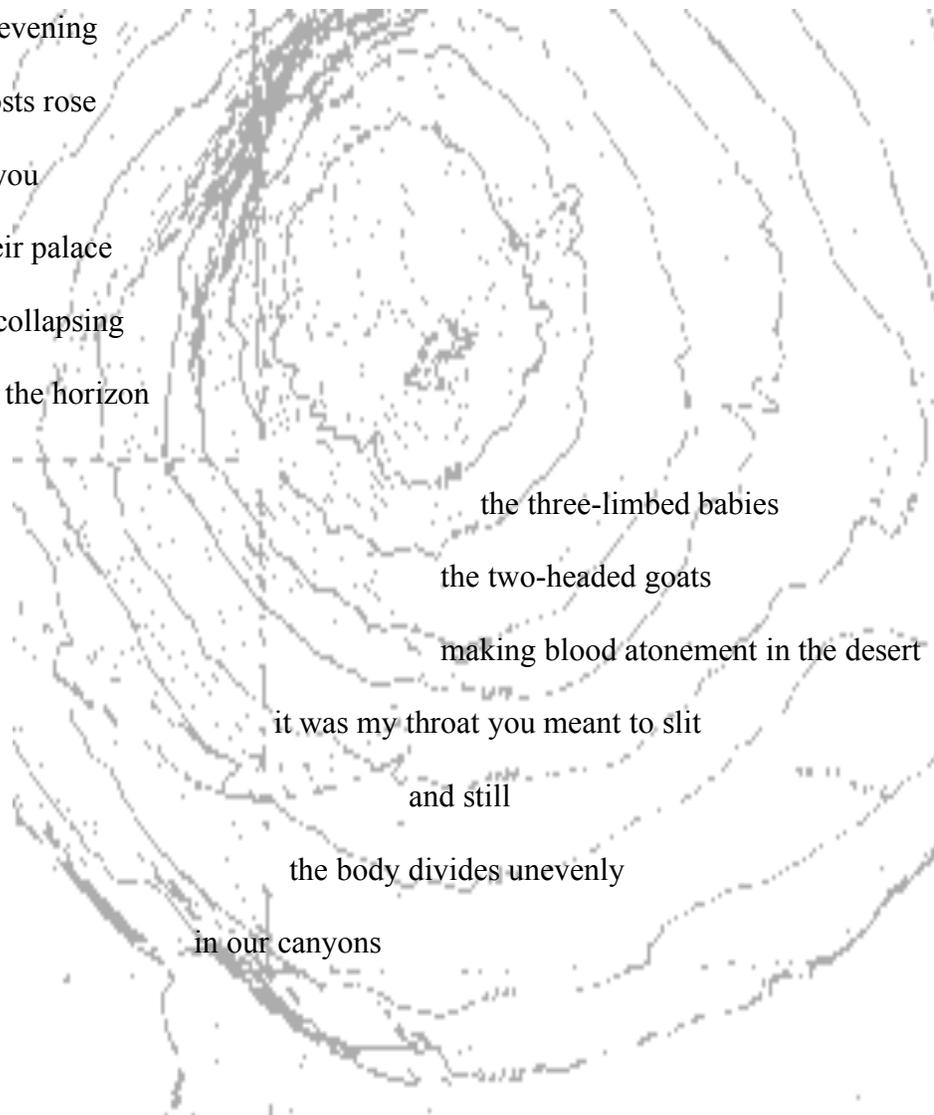
adrift with your vision
your crooked window swinging open
to the tall pine beside your building
you filled the spoon with honey
it spread across the metal face
blood opening through your iris
ink blotting
when the retina detached
and we had to go
out into a storm
an evening gown
snapping fabric
snow



Inside our bodies salt red
primordial seas we came
up out of its center

North – Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
North by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
North by Northeast—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
Northeast by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
East by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
East by South—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
Southeast by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
Southeast by South—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
South by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
South—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
South by West—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
Southwest by South—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
Southwest by West—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
West—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
West by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
Northwest by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
North by West—Mud salt crystals, rocks, water

In the evening
the ghosts rose
out of you
into their palace
as salt collapsing
against the horizon



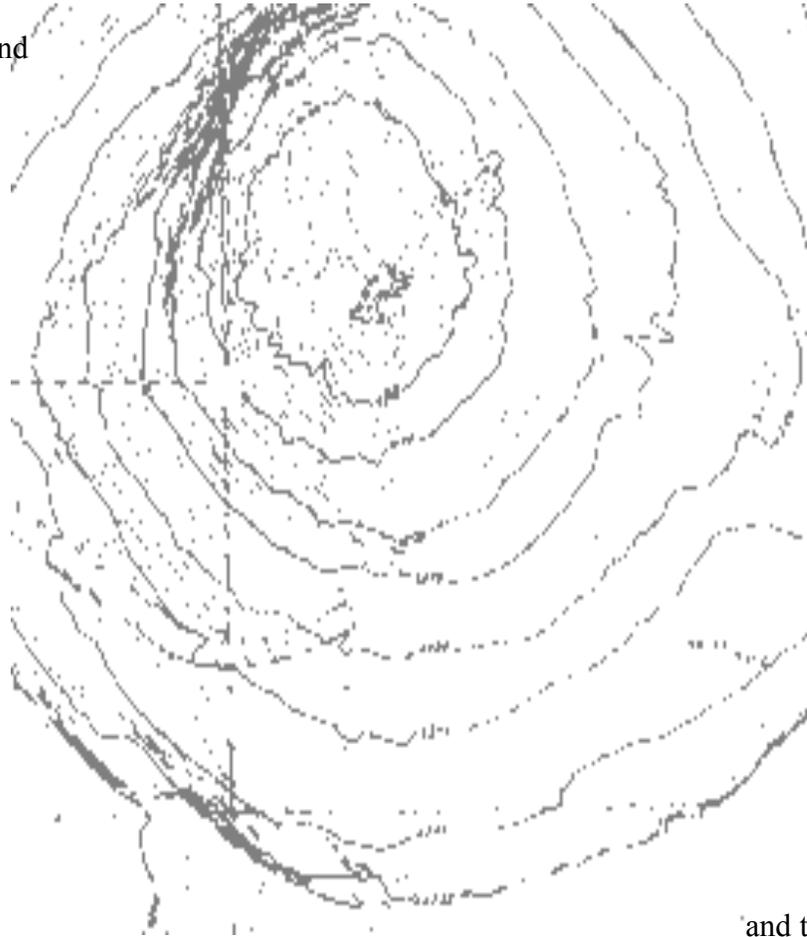
the three-limbed babies
the two-headed goats
making blood atonement in the desert
it was my throat you meant to slit
and still
the body divides unevenly
in our canyons

(there were always knives in Zion)

you were asleep in the garden
with dirt smeared inside your underwear
and we let you sleep in our house for two days
before you went home
counted your blessings
two years of food in your pantry
for when the time came
you would walk through the burning world
into a new Zion

*I closed my eyes, and the sun burnt crimson through the lids. I opened them and the
Great Salt Lake was bleeding scarlet streaks.*

you brought a shot gun
went to the desert and you shot
over the salt flats
bright intervals in which nothing moved
it was white all around
and you were thirsty



and the desert was
a green world
at its roots

you were neon

like a pine needle

a snow drift

as your breasts fell off

as your ovaries go bad in your gut

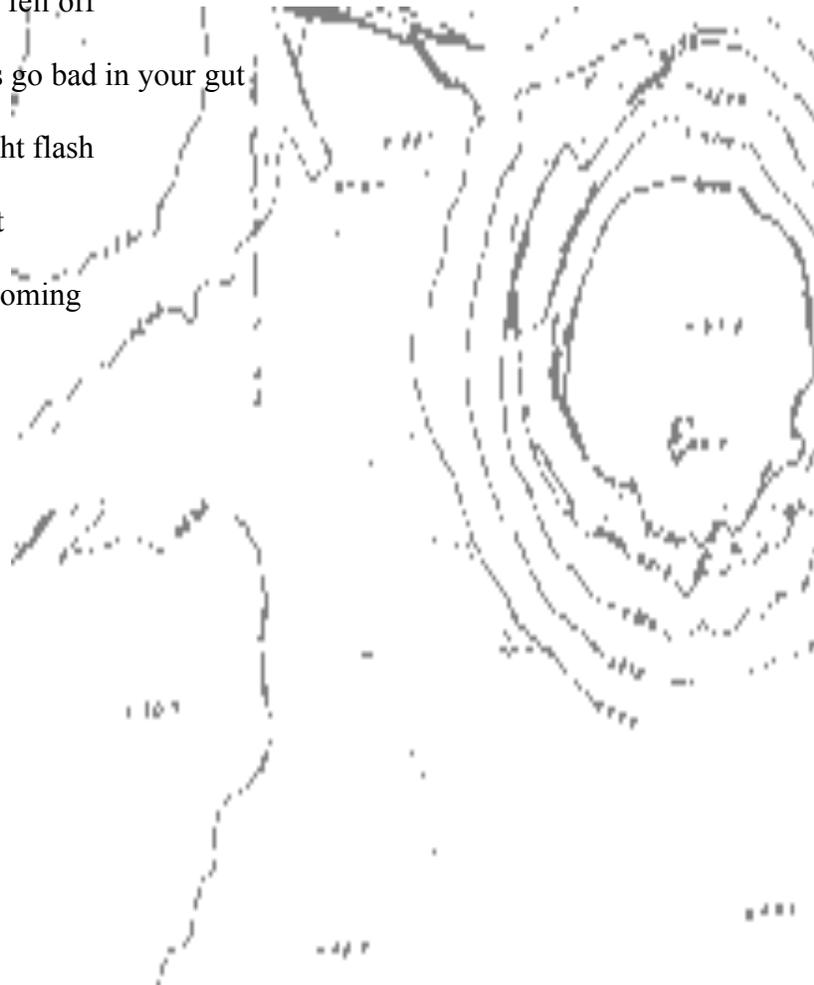
gilt thread bright flash

the glass desert

half-lit and blooming

in cells

in bones



A High Lonesome

Visible knitting nest
knitting pink balloon
knitting oak tree

knitting oak tree

a line of daffodils are bright yellow cups

I was holding a shopping bag
of dog shit
worrying

If the sun ever comes out

holes in the lawn

barn swallows
pull weather foam
from the window
into their nest

mocking birds
mating all night

this song

this song

I was wide awake
listening

the windowpane

the kitchen pipes

this song

I was alone
when someone opened the front door
left the chain tight in the lock
while I slept
I was alone
and taped the door shut
that song
a rope of bells hanging from yarn

You Move

under

the branches

your skin

radiates

maple

leaves

light

the sidewalk

leaves

leaves

there

when

you

Outside New Harmony

men cleaning deer gore off their hands at the sink
leave pink boot marks on the tile
their bodies smeared in deer urine
smelled like death

hard green apricots
trees a dusty line
behind the gas station

nature is instant

a green tarp snapping in the back of a pick-up truck

Leigh shakes red sand out of her shoes
her hair braided down her back
falls across her shoulder
and all the dust that shakes loose

you couldn't believe how blue the sky was

Salt Flats

can seagulls the geese
needle a blue bench
blood on the picnic table
moving into orchards
rows of cherry trees where the tourists pick their own fruit
empty apple farm parking lot
too early for apples there's snow
in the mountains
trash on I-80
an avalanche rut through the pine trees
black soil swatch of deciduous forest
riot of pollen

honeybee

one

minute

we're

the other side of a cattle fence

sagebrush and desert tea bushes

remember someone's teeth biting the stems

but the name

yellow blossom

their own

the sand at this speed

our bodies

keep going west

there's snow in the mountain still

glass glittering in the median

blossoms & reflective tape losing its shine as you approach

make a shadow
the Great Salt Lake

makes a shadow

a shoreline just settling

unsettling

in our mirror

shade moves

across the Wasatch

behind us

like hole punches

eared grebe float towards the center of the lake

a haze of brine flies

breaking along the shore

a chemical weapons incinerator

where the water evaporates

a shoreline

across the state line

yellow aprons hanging in windows blossom

curtains and aprons change by Bella's brothel
up the road

pancakes
pumpkin cookies the Piute waitress sells from a glass
display case near the register

her own recipe

*They tested nuclear weapons
out there*

the landscape

rust-colored

alkaline

sand blown over the wooden barracks outside

Wendover

“the death fields”

keep moving

pinyon

juniper

smoke

kestrel

bright red cactus flower where we find a hummingbird

rust-colored

alkaline

old Christmas trees

planted in the salt flats

behind us

tinsel and red ornaments glittering in the sun

maybe melting

*I got space and
time like a broken watch*
—Robert Creeley

*Thyme /
/ Mirrors in her Garden*

In the afternoon, we sit on our pink corduroy couch. Our dog, Franklin, sits across the back pillows, puts his head on the windowsill and watches the foot traffic on 3rd Avenue. Sometimes a hand reaches up to our screen to pat his nose. Our friends. We listen to strangers say *hello* to him as they pass. We listen as Christine stops to ask him how his day has been so far through the window. We lie down and listen.

*

Our dog's tail wags and he is beautiful in the sunlight. There.

In two weeks we have given our mattress away to one of your students who has been sleeping on the floor of her apartment building for a month. In two weeks we have begun to sleep on the couch's pull-out mattress. The Drexel TV O'Matic. You don't think anyone has ever slept on this mattress before. The couch was covered in plastic when you bought it.

The bars beneath the mattress hurt our backs.

*

The couch is too heavy to take with us and we leave it for a friend who is moving into our apartment after we've gone. You think we'll be able to find something better in a thrift store in Alabama. I think the thrift furniture in the south is haunted and damp.

*

We are moving to Tuscaloosa because there are jobs for us there, because I go to school there. There is a house and a yard. We are losing Salt Lake to Tuscaloosa as we move through it. We are beginning to collect Salt Lake into a city we can carry with us.

*

Christine's thumb ring glints through the screen of our front window and then it's gone. She walks next door.

We miss our friends.

*

We are going to miss you.

In the morning we go to the coffee shop around the corner from our house and Katie, the barista, gives us free Americanos because she likes us and she knows that we don't have very much money. She is our neighbor. She once moved to Brooklyn for a year and then came back and works sometimes in the bookstore that is going out of business and most of the time in our neighborhood coffee shop. She makes books sometimes. She has a moustache and no one cares.

We know that the Mormon massage therapist who lived above her last year moved to an apartment across the building because Katie listened to NPR too loudly. And now the Mormon massage therapist lives above Esther and Jordan. She stomps on the floor of her apartment when all of our friends are there eating dinner. She doesn't open the door when Jordan knocks to apologize. Her clients walk up and down the stairwell all afternoon. Sometimes she has "Generational Therapy" sessions on Saturdays and no one stomps on the floor above her to keep them quiet.

We listen to her stomp on the floor on Sundays while we eat dinner together.

*

We make dinner for each other almost every week.

Halina is rosemary.

Christine is spinach.

Ely is whiskey.

We are corn.

We are blueberries.

Jordon is grilled meat.

Esther is egg.

Nobody has any money.

We leave our leftovers with Esther and Jordan because Jordan can't find a job.

Esther always brings food back to us the next day because our pay was cut by a third. Because in three weeks we have left for Alabama.

*

So often people dream of an ideal life 'in community,' forgetting that a 'community' is not an end in itself, but a frame for higher qualities—the qualities of the mind and the heart. Making a good community is not a magic formula for happiness and good; making a good community is the result of the happiness and good which people already possess in principle, and the community, whether of one family or several, is the infinite variable expression of the excellences of human beings, not their causes.

*

It's afternoon and you are on our back porch in the shade. You can't believe we will live somewhere else. We are listening to a Chopin record we bought at the DI Thrift Store for a dollar. Even though we are poor we can still buy things for a dollar. Esther's cats are watching you through their screen door.

At night we listen to Christine and Ely's cat, Hermann, meow through their screen door. We say he's calling. He sounds like a bullfrog. Sometimes we smell cigarette smoke and we know that Christine is smoking on the back porch. We know Ely must be somewhere else. Esther comes to the screen door and asks if we want to go up to the park later to watch the fireworks.

*

It's the 4th of July and we have a box of sparklers. You aren't sure if you like sparklers. Light comes down through our neighbor's oak tree spilling on the porch. Light comes down through the back fence. Light comes down on our building's back stairs. Gnats moving in the light.

You remember a birthday party here. Everyone brought you whiskey. Erin brought a box of sparklers. Everyone wrote their names in the dark. Everyone's names were green light and then dark.

Everyone likes sparklers. It's the 4th of July.

*

The Russian Olives smell sugary in the heat as we spread quilts beside the baseball diamond in the park. The hill where we sit blurs out as the sun drops below the Oquirrh Mountains.

We are walking up M Street, past the mortuary, the lower cemetery gate, the bright yellow house I thought I would live in when I was in High School. The garden I thought I would have. We pick apricots off branches that cross the sidewalk. Our neighbors' lawn is made of thyme. Tomatoes are turning red in their gardens.

*

We are walking up M Street and remembering walks with our dog to this place. Here. We unhooked his leash and he chewed sticks beside us in the shade of the willow trees.

Sunset you cannot imagine. The hills blur out, our blanket and the tops of willow trees when Esther takes out her banjo.

*

Esther is taking out her banjo.

We listen to her practice through the walls of our apartment. You and I falling asleep in our bedroom and Esther playing in her living room. A thin wall between us. Sometimes at night, after dinner parties when we have gone home, I put my hand against the wall. I can feel her and Jordan washing their dishes on the other side.

*

In three weeks we will have listened to her play her banjo for the last time. Ely plays the guitar and you play Jordan's harmonica. In three weeks we have driven away from our friends.

We are dreaming that our Friends are our Friends, and that we are our Friends' Friends.

Esther made an orange cake for us.

*

There is a graveyard on the other side of the chain link fence. Quiet neighbors. Deer eat between the gravestones. We watch their tails flicker in the streetlights.

The city is light before the stars are light. Make the sky an echo. You and Christine and Jordan are smoking cloves. Ely leans against the fence. In the center of the baseball diamond behind us teenagers set off fireworks. Bright fountains of color.

*

Even in the space between explosions, everything becomes a matter of light.

I remember a vase of chrysanthemums and lilies opening on the coffee table. I remember disks of light in the afternoon. Our neighbor has mirrors in her garden that send light across the street to us.

*

In the Avenues, teenagers shoot bottle rockets over the heads of families in the park. Our family lit up for a moment, then dark.

On a blanket below us someone is talking about Ted Nugent. “The Nudge.” Little kids lay flat on their backs watching the sky. The deer are the light of their eyes. All the grown-ups open cans of beer or bottles of wine.

*

In two weeks it will be your birthday. I make you a pistachio cake with dark chocolate frosting. All of our friends are there. At the end of the evening Derek breaks your whiskey tumbler. At the end of the evening everyone goes home.

*

We are sitting on a quilt together in the dark.

*

It's been two weeks and Kathryn and Geoff are already gone. In three weeks we are driving across Nebraska. In four weeks Christine and Ely have packed their moving truck. In four weeks Esther tells us the new neighbors are quiet.

Dead Pines Make Their Living Neighbors

Shadows

names sharpied along the backs of paper plates

stop signs

a shot up deer crossing

marking an interior

yellow tree sap hardening on bark

the shape of the words

This is the Place

a family fanning plates dry beside their camper

our dog sleeping beneath a picnic table

I write "out" see sunlight on

and plastic bags tacked to tree trunks blossom beside our tent.

A dog barks.

Your hair has ash in it.

II.
New Harmony

The door was open and we went through.
—Dorothy Wordsworth

Home

was a word
breathed together

sun slanting exactly
here

not yours
like a body

the words don't keep
still

coffee rings a form
the eyes stop up

this sky splints, bruises
or this is a warning

Watch.

A noise splitting the distance

the high, lonesome sound
we sing together

What Comes Through

As fall
a
late September
&
bird body
bright l(y)
 (e)e
 a(l)
 (l)v
 e(o)
 (w)s
falling
& l(r)
 e
 (a)a
 v(i)
 (n)e
 (s)
fall(ing)

Nesting

Turtles freeze into mud banks in winter. I saw this illustrated on a worksheet about seasonal changes in the wetlands I colored in in elementary school.

At Christmas Nathan and I skate on the Belle River behind his parents' house and I watch him stop and scrape snow off the surface to see if he can find some fish locked in ice, visible below us. Beside us there's a graveyard, a rusted seawall between us. To think of all the small movement in winter.

This afternoon I watched a robin come back from death.

When I was a little girl ice skating on the frozen wetlands across the street from our house, I found a Canada goose half-submerged in the ice, neck broken and bent into the dry cattails, and I skated around it. Canada geese make home a direction we point towards or something we give ourselves up to inhabit. In the spring it's flattened in the mud.

There is a kind of danger in turning something into a symbol that in doing so we take the thing out of its context and fix it to a meaning.

There are hundreds of robins roosting in the bare trees that divide our neighbor's yard from our yard. A robin flew so hard into our front window it knocked the screen forward a little into our living room. It looked like its neck was broken, the way its throat stretched back to its half-folded wings, the round chest twitching against the lawn.

What does it mean for a bird to crash into your window? Gaston Bachelard says a bird is a perfect roundness; it makes a nest with its chest. I watch the bird's head begin to move; it folds its wings back under and rights itself. I watch it roost in the clover beneath our window for a moment before coming to its feet and hopping to the edge of our chain-link fence.

Nathan goes out to get the mail knowing that when he walks outside the bird will either fly and we'll know it's OK or it won't and we'll have to do something about it. I don't think I could break a robin's neck. I think it might be bad luck but I don't know who would fix a broken bird here. My neighbors are duck hunting.

I watch them load their trucks and net their camouflaged boats last night. Their Labrador retriever walks to the edge of their driveway as we pass them with our dog and we cross the street. We don't know if their dog is friendly.

It's winter or it's duck season. We can mark time by what we can take away.

I've watched dogs break birds' necks quickly and efficiently with a shake of their head. They train for it with their toys and I haven't got a problem with hunting besides. My parents have a freezer full of ducks and my father cooks them in cherry sauce.

Last week heaven was: an ash tree shaking with robins; I wrote down *a red breast marking the sky moving*. Is it a kind of salvation to have a robin crash against our living room window and come back to life?

I've only started using the word "salvation" and asking questions about salvation now that I live with an ex-Baptist—though I remember always knowing God was neither contractual nor rational, that no one could speak for God. I remember the day my Father pulled our family out of Church and told us that God made a beautiful world and it was a sin to listen to some asshole tell us how to live in it, who to love or how to feel about ourselves in it. We had just moved to Utah and the mountains startled us.

Nathan is antsy today because there's too much time and not enough structure to it. We walk to JD's with Franklin and I wait outside while he gets candy and a bottle of coke. We've slept all afternoon because our home in winter in Alabama is so cold we turn torpid. Lemonheads are a quarter and bright.

Listening to Joseph Lease say on the Writers Block "I love Keats' beautiful idea that we are not put on this earth only to suffer and be tested. We are also put here to make our souls," I consider the quality of soul I am making here where the robins break their necks against our houses and leave saliva dried to the window pane and feathers: a nest I press with my chest out into.

In Every Attentive Look

We sing together

what belongs to the eye: bright pistil

some blossom I

don't know the name

like trumpet vine

like tiger lilies

some round horn flower out in the kudzu

eyes in molasses light

mine is no thing at all

a snake rippling the water

ripped innertube on the shore

what's the difference?

Horizons

every one
is remembering
a single line
a mouthful
say I border
my body
filmy
ghost

filmy body

my border

I say

a mouthful

a line

single a

remembering

is one

every I

ghost filmy

body

my border

I say
a mouthful
a single line
is remembering
every one.

Pin Cherry

or you are in your living room or yellow or low color or light or a blown
head jagged or clover some blue sky or a bramble or what brambles you
here or orange or busted or collapsing or wading pool in the grass gra
ckles chattering groan or the dog would come outside but for the bees
in the lawn or the bees pollinate pin cherry tree

or you are in your living room or
yellow or low
color or light or a blown
head jagged
or clover some blue sky
or a bramble
or what brambles you here
orange or busted
or collapsing or wading
pool in the grass
grackles chattering
the dog would
come outside
if for the bees in the lawn
or the bees pollinate
pin cherry tree

*or color or here
grass if cherry tree
you or some orange
grackle for the bees arc
light blue or chattering
bees in or sky busted
you're chattering in your
living room
blown or collapsing groan
the room head brambled or lawn
or jagged or the yellow leaves
or what wading dog the bees
or what brambles you
pool would the bees come
pollinate low clover
you the outside pin cherry.*

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